**Review: [Untitled]**

Reviewed Work(s):

*Voyage to Cythera* by Theodore Angelopoulos; A Productions, Zdf, Channel 4, Greek Tv; Center of Greek Cinema

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forced. Jeff has just proposed a stakeout of Frank Booth's apartment building. Instead of letting the action unfold, Lynch cuts to Jeff and Sandy. Jeff relates what happened over shots of the stakeout. These shots are played for Sandy's enlightenment, just as the film plays for our benefit.

In another sense, though, we must question the implications of this passive observation, as opposed to active doing, for the woman in film. This type of relating, serving to bind the couple through their joint interest in some common endeavor, has been typically considered to be dependent and regressive. However, it is possible to view this "greater tendency for affiliativeness,"[10] which we see in Sandy's tenacious affirmation of Jeff, in a less loaded way. Through identification with the caretaking mother, the female child develops a "sense of self (which) derives from the individual interacting within a relationship rather than by separating."[11] Sandy's affirming look, then, can relate to her role as external-object mother to Jeff and also to her desire for affiliativeness developed through identification with her own mother. That the common endeavors that generally bind the couple are his and the burden for maintaining the relationship hers is clearly not a positive aspect, yet the concept of affiliativeness, nurturance, and interaction can be seen as a valuable alternative to the appropriation of the male gaze. This appropriation is not necessarily a viable alternative, or even a desirable one.

This look of affirmation, like the investigative look, is not, of course, unique to *Blue Velvet,* but can be found throughout film, television, and other media such as the publicity poster. The poster for *Saturday Night Fever,* to offer just one example, depicted a white-suited John Travolta looking confidently at the viewer. His female partner clings to his side while gazing intently up at his face. The question is not whether this stereotyped construction of roles exists, but whether its identification and study can offer any possibilities for either an alternative film reading or film practice. *Blue Velvet* offers traditional constructions of men looking at women and women looking at men, but by virtue of its power, quirkiness, and difference, particularly in the realm of tone, the established romantic couple that is presented in the end cannot be taken for granted. Sandy's irony operates like that of the opening shots. Why do these common images, this simple girl draw such nervous laughter? Perhaps a barely perceptible filter on the flowers, a slight slow motion to the fireman's wave, a mild angularity in Sandy's features are enough to throw us off-kilter. Despite the apparent simplicity, we know that all is not as it should be. We are confronted with mystery. The scene of the women fixing lunch in the kitchen while the men garden does not necessarily depict paradise—as the suspiciously mechanical-looking robin that brings happiness so clearly suggests by bringing a dead insect as well.

But there is still one more problem. Like the film, this analysis ends with a hero fully plumed, his psychic self dissected like a frog, and a heroine who remains a mystery. As played by Laura Dern, Sandy is likable yet enigmatic. This accomplished, "up-and-coming" actress has spent three films discovering romantic love: as the blind girl who "sees" a deformed boy's true beauty in *Mask;* as a teen-ager allegorically awakening to her sexual desires in *Smooth Talk;* and in *Blue Velvet,* finally wanting to settle down with the man of her dreams (or, rather, the man in Lynch's dreams). While Jeff's psychosexual development has been rigorously depicted, Sandy remains a mystery. Sandy looks, but although she is firmly established as the sexual partner—as Dorothy is established as the mother—she is hardly available for feminist appropriation. Investigation and affiliativeness are valuable and valid, but perhaps it is time the gaze shifted.

In a late scene in *Blue Velvet,* Sandy is shown reflected in, but turned away from, a mirror in her pink bedroom as she speaks via telephone to Jeff. Her worried questions reveal that she wonders what he is doing, whether they have a future together. Sandy's failure is that she never turns around and looks at herself.

—TRACY BIGA

## VOYAGE TO CYTHERA

**Director: Theodore Angelopoulos. Script: Angelopoulos, Th. Vaitinos, and Antonin Guerra. Photography: Georges Arvanatis. Music: Helen Karaindrou. Produced by A Productions, ZDF, Channel 4, Greek TV, and Center of Greek Cinema.**

The prize that *Voyage to Cythera* received at Cannes was late recognition of the talent an-

nounced by the admirable *Traveling Players,* but little noticed in its time—almost ten years ago. Angelopoulos is one of the true consistent *auteurs* of contemporary film-making. A captivating visual beauty revealed itself in his political films, challenging both aesthetic structures and thematic content. History and power are in the center of his universe, where the harms of all kinds of totalitarian ideology are clearly manifest. However, his ironic wisdom avoids didacticism in favor of a personal poetic meditation, an evocative epic and lyrical reflection on the history of Greece.

Traveling has been a central metaphor for the films of Angelopoulos; it's almost as if his imagination only awakens "on the road." But he travels with the audacity and assurance of a king. The landscape and its history seem to welcome him, as do the mysterious gods. (After all, in his films aren't we near Olympus?) Coming after *The Traveling Players,* the title of his new film immediately suggests the direction of this new exploration. Cythera, in Greek mythology, is the isle of dreams where one can dedicate oneself to happiness (or the search for it); it thus represents all that imagination creates. But for "homo politicus"—as we all of course are—the imaginary journey cannot be a romantic idyll: it brings along with it specific responsibilities, forebodings, and failures. And so, even though Angelopoulos's accent has shifted, the décor changed, he has not really departed from his earlier path.

The structure of *Voyage to Cythera* is a masterful presentation of the two worlds of reality and imagination, serving to confront them, shuffle them, and fuse them together in a dazzling display. At the first level of the story, the hero is a director, Alexander, whose journey takes him through the twisting and tortuous path of creating a film. Internal anxiety and uncertainty drive him on. His principal preoccupation consists in asking himself how to give form to the shapeless, to choose from amongst the endless alternatives the world offers. But Angelopoulos does not restrict his *8-1/2* to this particular conflict; he does not reduce the drama to a single dilemma. Guided by the journey metaphor, he displays the story, places it in time, and incites us to travel magically; he unveils the pitfalls of certainty and doubt and calls upon us to live a new adventure.

We are thus on the move, replete with fresh horses, we are always on the move.

One morning, no different from any other morning, our hero wakes up and goes to work at the dream factory: among the flashy movie sets, during the familiar routines, the armada of collaborators swarm, rehearse, and profane the fragility of the vision. But already "I'm losing the rhythm"—like Alexander more than once during the film—and I must stop to note that the opening is more finely woven. The first image, like a hint of a vague and faraway tune, awakens a memory from the past, from the years of World War II: a child—the hero himself as a child or is it already his imagination which confuses the past and dreams?—taunts a German soldier with the foolhardy impudence of the innocent, and then runs away at full speed through a silent labyrinth of deserted streets and leprous walls. It's a startling fragment whose enigmatic concentration introduces the always present historical sensibility of Angelopoulos; the events of the film never unfold in a foggy poetic abstraction.

So it's under the double sign of imagination and daily life that the opening of *Voyage to Cythera* is offered to our gaze. The film proposes to reveal the sources, the physical and geographic roots of the artistic inspiration. We witness a decisive moment: Alexander is mesmerized by the face of an old man he notices by chance. This glimpse sets him on the path to the film within Angelopoulos's film—a hypothetical, virtual film. And once he has entered upon this path he experiences a sort of vertigo, which we also come to share. The moment is elusive, the transition so subtly accomplished that we realize it only after the fact, when we are already caught up too, and like him uncertain of the very delicate boundary between the world of reality and the world of the imaginary. This interpenetration is the essence of Angelopoulos: for him, the two have exactly the same weight and the same quality. The creative work is also the life of the creator; it has a continuous physical reality of its own. Imagination is not a holiday excursion, it is not a separate realm reserved for illuminations which are above or outside of physical reality; it is inextricably linked with the

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A few biographical details on Theodore Angelopoulos: Born in Athens, 1935. Attended IDHEC (was dropped for "conformism"), returned to Greece in 1964, when Papandreou came to power; started writing film criticism. Short: *Emission* (1968). Features: *Reconstitution* (1970), *Days of '36* (1972), *The Traveling Players* (1974–75), *Hunters* (1977), *Alexander the Great* (1980), *Voyage to Cythera* (1984).

VOYAGE TO CYTHERA, *directed by Theodore Angelopoulos*

unerasable presence of an intruding reality whose richness is everpresent.

The film Alexander's making is also the story of a particular journey leading us from the past to the present, from one unknown to another. The beginning and the end have a disconcerting open-ended structure, but the journey is rooted in a concrete historical and socio-psychological reality. This journey has nothing metaphysical in it: it is a painful human destiny, cruelly determined by the long wars as well as by the short truces of our century.

We follow the coming home of an old man. Having spent his youth in the resistance and as a partisan, he was then forced to emigrate during the dictatorship of the Colonels. After more than thirty years he attempts to return home. How does one build a bridge to span thirty years of silence? Will one find again a common language for reunion, will one find enough reserves of feeling and thought to mend the torn fabric of continuity? His encounters do not bode well. The gap is too large to be easily bridged. Ties with family, old neighbors, and relations with authorities threaten to rupture. Too much political history has passed by in his absence. He finds himself a stranger.

One could say there is nothing surprising in this, that it's almost to be expected. But what's at stake is not the result, it is the experience, the pitiless process that obliges us to live out the inevitable. One of the fatal characteristics of the voyage is that the traveler cannot determine his itinerary. Crushed by the burden of this incessant tension, he must experience the painful sensation of feeling himself a stranger, and endure the merciless harassments of the authorities. To be deprived of his rights in every domain is the fate of our Ulysses. He has no more right to his country, nor to his abandoned land and home, nor even to his own death, which is imposed upon him from without, by the judgment of others, as a punishment.

Why is the verdict so harsh? Is it due to the sin of infidelity, because he veered from the road that others have followed? We are probably nearer to the truth if we say that this fate illustrates the implacable social reality of our times, that human beings are no longer in control of their own lives. We lose this power if we belong to the flock, but also if we struggle for a new order. The terrible irony is that it is through his desire to serve the people that the old man ends up alienated from them.

The portrait of the hero is exceptionally powerful. The lean and wizened old man executes his task with an imperturbable seriousness. From the first moment, we have the impression that he mechanically obeys the secret and heartless dictates of his destiny. He is incapable of being warm and open. "I have never seen him laugh, not once," says his daughter, no doubt

because the uprooting of exile brings with it a sullen coldness, added to the frustrated rigidness acquired so often by political activists. The exile's forceful character, hardened by wars, has become austere indifference, arid self-centeredness. Ideals, feelings, familial love, the sweetness of a known landscape—they have eluded him. He is left with a few sparse memories, snatches of a melody sung with a buddy, a modest suitcase and a violin. Are the meanings of these symbols too obvious? Maybe. Fortunately, Angelopoulos does not insist on their meaning, does not burden them with a superfluous underlining. The objects accompany the hero like the recurrent adjectives of the ancient epic poems, and their presence simply serves as a reminder of the impossibility of integration, the physical reality of exclusion.

For the paradox of the old man's journey is that he never arrives. Obviously he wants to rest, to find his home again, but he is unable to come to rest before the complete rejection. Staying on the move proves to be an implacable necessity. He must keep going, always keep going. At first it is because he wants to see everything; his curiosity propels him. He wants to rediscover the décor of the past, the old house, the land, the mountains where he spent his years in the resistance. Then he must move on because he is forced to by the authorities, because he must reach the calvary of exclusion. He must respect the imposed stops. He seems then to float between heaven and earth, in a no man's land, on a more than symbolic raft where he awaits a fate stripped of all hope.

But the story of the old man is only the core of another, or perhaps its skin. A fugue is hidden in a fugue—one emerges from the other, reality and poetry subtly overlap. For instance, in the film within the film, Alexander, the director hero, plays the part of the old man's son. One does not have to be a stubborn Freudian to foresee the inevitable drama simmering in the accusatory relationship of the father and his son. The relentless portrayal is striking. For the father, despite his tragic lot, is unable to inspire compassion and indulgence from his own kin. "You are a fossil," says a neighbor, who cannot forgive him for having always sown unrest, "You don't exist. Long past are the times where you would ride through the mountains with your gun. You are a fossil." The odious judgment seems painfully true, for his hands are empty, and he will leave nothing of value as his legacy. The accusation is valid not only for the present, but also for the past, and for all the time in between. What in him is worthy of respect? His stubbornness, his dubious courage which made him abandon his family and his home with no hesitation? When people see the sad shadow of his former self, they pass their bitter judgment. "You've never thought of others," says his daughter. "You and your generation. You fought a revolution, you joined the partisans, and you took off." He who left does not have the right to come back so easily. "Why did you come back?" he is asked, and the old man can offer no answer.

The leftist, the resistance fighter, has become an anachronistic being, on the fringe of real life. If the subject of the film within the film is the farewell to the father, indeed to the generation of World War II fathers glorified for so long, then this farewell is doubly upsetting. Beyond the theme of separation, the film is about the tragic poverty of that which is passed from father to son. Alexander is particularly troubled because the loss does not seem to bother him. His loss consists in not really feeling any sense of loss.

Why did Alexander make a hero out of the father? Because we can, after all, perceive a deep affinity between the two. He doesn't content himself with settling a score with "the other," with him who is different: he also has to come face to face with that which resembles himself, even though this resemblance makes him uncomfortable. The marginal character of the exile makes Alexander see what is marginal in himself. Doubtless, the old man cut himself off from life, but didn't a similar thing happen to the generation of the son, this generation of lost illusions which is Alexander's? Let's go further: the shadowiness, the need to isolate, the arid solitude, aren't these inherent in the fate of the artist? Moreover, what became of *his* great ideals? Where is Cythera, the isle of happiness? Finally, all that is left for him is to explain and understand powerlessness. And so the two poles confront each other: the powerlessness of the father and the struggle of the artist, his son, to name it. With the father's death, the artist's journey does reaches an end. For creating, like departing, is also dying a little.

The emotional journey of the film is that of

the inevitable progression of grief. The voyage of Alexander does not take him closer to clarity, but toward darker regions, through three different circles. The first circle is the story of the embarkation, Alexander leaving his daily environment, the second one is the creation of the dreamed hero, the meeting with the unknown father in the classic situations and conflicts of the film within the film; and the last circle focuses on the relationship between the artist and the old man. The voyage is an act of self-criticism, the analysis of Alexander's creative power and a vision, a meditation on the surrounding world. As the artist's reflection on the story begins to dominate, the shadows of solitude, anguish, and numerous deceptions are also projected. In the journey of the hero in *Voyage to Cythera,* the entire tragedy of all human undertaking is implied: the need to depart from the known, the desire to understand the unknown, the dark—the challenge of freedom, "the passion for the possible," in the words to Ricoeur, and the prize, the curse, and the burden of freedom.

But, under this classic horizontal structure, or rather inside of it, we might discover another structural concept that orders the rich material. As we have seen, imagination and reality mix, reflect each other. In the film that Alexander makes, he is present as a son, but his lover, an actress, also appears as his sister. Reality intervenes in all fiction. Inspiration digs for its treasure from the well of real life, fiction is the modified face of reality. The presence of reality within fiction results in a specific quality and a stimulating difference. The introduction of real-life characters, with its slight but unrelenting distancing, creates an incomparable effect.

The keeping up of this oscillation, this ambiguity loaded with meaning, is Angelopoulos's originality. Because nothing would be easier than merely reversing the common hierarchy and instead giving free rein to the interior realm of the imagination. We have seen it abused in countless films with flashbacks and dream sequences. But Angelopoulos refuses any hierarchy, any rigid delineation. What unfolds under our gaze does not take place in the past tense usually used in stories, but the could-be (or will-be), intriguing and undefined, colors the action. The journey remains open thanks to the uncommon play of the conditional and the future, and to a slight lag between the two. One example only, and a wonderful one: when the old man and his family go for dinner in the abandoned and closed-up house of his ancestral village, plates *already* filled with soup, laid neatly on an *already* set table, provoke a touch of the unreal, a willful disturbance, which remind us of the presence of imagination, of the work of fiction. The subtle fissure in the story must suggest the unreal.

By using the conditional, Angelopoulos thus creates a new sense of time, different from that of his earlier films. The overlapping of different layers of time, the free manipulation of time, have always dominated his *écriture.* But, in *Voyage to Cythera,* a new complexity enriches the dual texture of the story. On one side, the action unfolds according to a clear and easy-to-follow chronology; but this horizontal development does not prevent another movement. This one is vertical, it represents the subjective time of imagination or, rather, the intemporality of the imaginary. In *The Traveling Players,* memory and history, historical consciousness, whether individual or collective, are intertwined amidst significant social and political turning points. Here, the historicity of time, the fusion of past and present cease; we watch the destruction of the walls which separate the *is* and the *could-be,* the *is* and the *will-be.* For example, the meals are prepared and offered to the protagonists but they are never actually eaten. We have the sensation of entering a musical space in which the constellation of instants has as much importance as the design of the melody. The rhythm is called upon to express the wanderings of the interior journey. It is not by chance that twice during his peregrination Alexander wonders if he hasn't lost the rhythm. One, two, three, he counts—is he trying to measure with steps the pulse of the film in progress? In any event he controls the precision of his creative gestures.

As in the other films of Angelopoulos, this time also the rhythmic accent is accompanied by a deliberate restraint. No other director takes such a calculated risk with the danger of slowness. But the *ritenuto* is an organic part of his composition; it is responsible for evoking the painful sensation of unresolvedness, of braking time, of inciting himself to concentration.

The new direction of Angelopoulos's journey required new techniques and a slightly different *écriture.* His use of the *plan-séquence* is certain-

ly dependent on a unique technique; as Gerard Pangon—the French critic—notes justifably, it undertakes new functions, foremost that of "going without a break from objectivity to subjectivity and vice versa." But maybe there is something else at work here. In *The Traveling Players,* the tension of the *plan-séquence* came from the fact that the continuity seems to us both threatened and threatening at the same time. At each instant, the field of vision is subjected to unexpected incursions, the aggression of politics and history come through in the images in an unforeseeable manner, according to the murderous whim of the arbitrary. Despite the vulnerability of the image, Angelopoulos could create an incredibly powerful sovereignty thanks to the autonomy of the camera, to the relationship between the camera and space, to the incomparable dignity and beauty of the composition. This beauty always seemed organic with its severe and taut order, not unlike the dignity of the poor. In the new film, this strict discipline, the rhetrical value as such of the *plan-séquence,* the "pride" of the omnipresent camera, seems to be slightly mitigated. The geometrical layout of the frame is also less stringent. The camera is more personal, more supple; because there is greater intimacy the composition exhibits a more tender rigorousness—if those two terms can be linked. The context of the preceding films gave rise to the lucidity of distance for each object; in *Voyage to Cythera,* a rapprochement begins to take shape. It is precisely through this greater suppleness and softer continuity that the expressive force and the depth of feeling reveal themselves. The finer and silkier musical texture is accentuated by the fact that dialogue is consciously neglected. The long silences, the dialogue reduced to snatches of words, accentuate the visual aspect of the work of the imagination, the metaphorical power of pictorial language. What little is said is often repeated as the variations of a musical theme, for example, "it's me," and "rotten apples" or the repetition of the actress's speech at the end of the film. These interior rhymes not only represent a structural principle, but also something about the work of the unconscious, that is to say the work of creation. The forms are imposed on us; after having once given its configuration to a sensation, they become independent and real; thus they continue irresistibly to articulate the chaotic contents of conscience. The repetitions dissolve, circle, and give rise to the illusion of possession: if we recognize a thing, we therefore understand it, thus it has become ours.

The structure that tends to organize, to enclose, imposes itself in the entire composition with more force than before. From the clashing movement in the first images, we arrive at the hero's absolute immobility in the last sequence. Between the two lies the requiem, with its pain, its loss, its acceptance. The last act of the traveler, a man of uncompromising integrity, is to reject not only Ulysses the father, but also Penelope the mother, humiliated and grief-stricken, in order to achieve final solitude, to arrive full circle. The story has reached its end. Cythera is not an island, but the voyage itself.

—YVETTE BIRO

## BLACK WIDOW

**Director: Bob Rafelson. Script: Ronald Bass. Producer: Harold Schneider. Photography: Conrad L. Hall. Music: Michael Small. Twentieth Century-Fox.**

Halfway through *Black Widow,* Alex Barnes (Debra Winger) exclaims to her boss, "Nobody knows why anyone does anything!" In the film, Alex is a Justice Department agent tracking down a woman she suspects of being a serial killer, a "black widow" who marries rich men and then kills them for their money.* Her statement, "Nobody knows why anyone does anything," is Alex's justification of her mission to her boss, but in that it exemplifies the film's point of view toward its material, it also unwittingly underscores *Black Widow's* essential failure in attempting to point out new directions for the genre of *film noir.*

In recent years, films such as *Body Heat* and *The Jagged Edge* have attempted to update *film noir,* most notably by transforming the role of women in the genre. In *Body Heat* (Lawrence Kasdan, 1981), the femme fatale is clearly the intellectual superior of the man she victimizes, and she also triumphs by escaping punishment

* This woman (played by Theresa Russell) is named variously in the film: as Catherine, the wife of a Mafioso; Marielle, the redheaded "airhead" married to a Texas toy manufacturer; Margaret, a sophisticated anthropologist who becomes a board member of a Seattle museum; Catherine, a sultry playgirl romancing a hotelier in Hawaii. For simplicity's sake, I will refer to her as "Catherine" throughout this review.